



FinovateFall 2013. Drinking from the Proverbial Firehose.

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The world of Fintech conferences is somewhat bloated with mediocre events that lack originality and content, but Finovate still stands out as something of a must see due to its unique format. For those of you not familiar, there are rules for Finovate – strict ones.

- As a presenter, you have seven minutes to make your case to the audience.
- You cannot use PowerPoint and that seven minutes is non-negotiable – a gong goes off at the seven minute mark and you are finished.

With these parameters, companies pitching at the show really have to think hard about how to stand out – in two days there are seventy presentations. And as if that wasn't enough, the audience consists of top investors and some of the most ruthless and snarky members of the fintech press and analyst community (who, me?...)

This baptism by fire is not for the faint hearted (two companies dropped out of the event at the last minute – coincidence?...). Seventy presentations provides something for everyone in the industry, and this may be one criticism of the show as it grows – fintech covers everything from retail mobile banking to new business loan origination to algo trading and this breadth means that if you are a specialist in a specific segment, you may find maybe one in every five or six presentations has some nugget of relevance.

It is therefore helpful not to consider your specific business line or coverage domain, but more broadly trends and technologies that could cross-pollenate.

These are the sessions that got my attention... Two Eastern European demos, one from Instabank in Russia and one from mBank / Accenture in Poland showed that mobile and online banking in the US is nowhere close to pushing the innovation envelope like is happening overseas.

- Instabank's presentation included a cleverly simple integration of P2P transfers with Facebook with the cunning viral component of a prepaid card sent to the funds recipient if they are not an Instabank customer.
- The mBank presentation focused on just one component of their innovation – the use of video conferencing with the bank to discuss personal lending and other services, but meeting them after the show, this was clearly the tip of the iceberg and chosen primarily for its visual impact.

The full suite includes Facebook integration, P2P, geolocation based rewards and a host of other services. It was no great surprise that mBank was one of the Finovate “best in show” winners.

Continuing the theme of integrating social networks with banking and payments, Akimbo card demonstrated free and instant money transfers via Facebook (apparently there is no other social network now) and the option to offer five sub-cards on a single prepaid account aimed at parents managing child allowances or roommates sharing bills. Clean, simple and functional.

Yodlee also presented another best-in-show winner “Tandem”. The premise being that in life, there are often multiple shared accounts and that managing these from a single portal is a real world need. They made a compelling case for PFM 360, all within a Google+esque interface that was both striking and intuitive. While social network integration was a key theme, so was gamification.

Flexscore, Dynamics and others brought in the concept of point collecting within banking or payment activity as a reward for involvement. While in the words of Flexscore “collecting points is fun”, I question how much fun I really want my financial services experience to be. Simple, trustworthy, efficient – yes. Fun?...

In terms of simple, Mitek also won a well-earned best in show demonstrating a mobile / tablet loan account opening offering, where all of the requisites for opening an account can be captured in just a few steps remotely. It is quite striking just how far document image capture has come in a very short time and Mitek is clearly at the sharp end of innovation in this space.

Finally, an oxymoron - cutting edge paper checks. Deluxe Corporation and VerifyValid showed a simple yet effective

solution for sending and receiving check payments online, with a free virtual lockbox and using either RDC or plain paper for the checks. While checks are hardly considered at the vanguard of payment technology, their ubiquity, low cost and familiarity with all strata of the population mean that there is life in the old dog yet. With the recent Durbin ruling, it may be that issuing banks have a fresh look at all components of checking for revenue generation and this Deluxe / VerifyValid offering could be just the ticket. The renaissance of checks, perhaps?...

In summary, Finovate is a must attend – still. It may be spreading a little thin in terms of frequency and geography, but the ability to see so many new products in so short a time is an invaluable service to those of us who need to stay on top of Fintech innovation.

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javelinstrategy.com

inquiry@javelinstrategy.com

925.225.9100